

Fw: Animas River's future

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FYI

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Change is the only constant.

- Heraclitus

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Animas River's future

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For as long as humans have lived in Durango - indeed long before that time - the Animas River has figured prominently in the region's ability to support vibrant communities. That role has shifted over time, but the Animas' link to Durango's economic and environmental vitality has a long and varied history that will continue to shape the community's future.

What that future looks like depends on how the many and divergent interests invested in the Animas River's health and longevity are able to mutually address their concerns about the fundamentals of the river's health - and, by extension, the economies of the communities through which the Animas flows. The momentum that is generating around that common set of goals bodes well, but there is no shortage of complexities that will inform the discussion and decision-making processes that follow.

Perhaps of primary importance to the entire Animas River watershed is the quality of the water that flows through it.

With toxins leaching into the river from above its headwaters as a result of abandoned mines, that quality is compromised. Fish populations are suffering, and it is unclear the effect that those contaminants have on humans. There is consensus that this scenario is far from ideal and requires a remedy, but identifying that remedy is less simple.

The Environmental Protection Agency has its eye on the upper reaches of the Animas River for a Superfund site - a designation that would bring federal resources to clean up mines in the Gladstone area. But with dollars, some fear, comes an economically harmful stigma associated with the designation.

That fear is not unwarranted, but the primary concern must focus on addressing the pressures being placed, increasingly, on the water quality of the Animas River. The mechanism by which that takes place is less important; there are simply too many resources that comprise and depend on a healthy Animas River system to justify inaction.

That becomes all the more essential as demand grows for the water in the river. While the Animas is not allocated beyond its capacity - a rarity in the western water world - that may not always be the case. Climate change resulting in hotter, drier weather patterns will certainly put pressure on the river's limited resource, making caring for what is there, as well as using it wisely, crucial.

The communities that enjoy the Animas River's meander through their core are increasingly aware of the critical role the waterway plays in their economic vibrancy. Whether for recreation, development or environmental uses, the river is at the heart of the region's identity.

Balancing the conflicting demands placed on the Animas River is no easy task, but it is nonetheless essential. Doing so ahead of a crisis - in terms of climate change and over-allocation - represents an opportunity for the region's residents.

Responding to past impacts is all the more urgent.

As a Western icon, famous for the dramatic canyons it carves, for the communities it has provided for and the opportunities it affords residents and visitors alike, the Animas River is nothing short of a treasure. That can be best acknowledged and honored through proactive

planning and responsive remedies.

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